

ANTIGONE ;

A POEM BY

SOPHOCLES ;

THE MUSIC BY

MENDELSSOHN.

Handwritten signature

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ANTIGONE,

A POEM BY SOPHOCLES.

The Imitative English Version by W. BARTHOLOMEW, Esq.

The Music by MENDELSSOHN.

SCENE.—THEBES. *Before the Palace of CREON; which has three entrances; that in the centre being exclusively for the King.*

Enter from the Palace, ANTIGONE and ISMENE.

ANTIGONE.

Ismene, dearest sister, is there one
Of all the evils hurled by mighty Jove
On Œdipus, our sire, that hath not fallen
On thee and me, the remnant of his children?
What soul-subduing anguish,—what disgrace
Exists, that we, unscath'd, endure not? And now,
The monarch's new decree proclaiming through
The city,—hast thou heard it,—knowest thou
How deeply it affects our friends and us?

ISMENE.

I know, that Fate hath reft us of our brothers,
Slain by each other's hand: and that, last night
Our Theban heroes chased the Argives hence.
I hear no other tidings, good or ill.

ANTIGONE.

To tell thee more, alone I drew thee hither.

ISMENE.

Explain at once; unveil thy troubled thoughts.

ANTIGONE.

Creon decrees thus for our brothers:—to one,
A tomb; to the other, foul dishonour.
Eteocles, he places in the earth,
With all the rites that sanctify the dead:
While Polynices lies exposed, to be
Entombed within the maws of carrion birds.

To all,—yea, to the sisters of the corse,
 Applies this mandate of the *gentle* Creon :
 Disdaining it, the penalty is—death !
 Now, knowing this ; it but remains for thee,
 To prove thy soul still noble, or degenerate.

ISMENE.

Alas, my sister ! what can I effect
 By scorning, or regarding, Creon's law ?

ANTIGONE.

Say ;—wilt thou aid me ; or, obey his will ?

ISMENE.

What aim is thine ?

ANTIGONE.

To inter the wretched corse.

ISMENE.

Inter it !—in defiance of the mandate ?

ANTIGONE.

. Yes, for a brother.

ISMENE.

Creon's will is law.

ANTIGONE.

Law ! weak against the duties of a sister.

ISMENE.

Oh ! call to mind our father's awful fate ;
 Who, for offences odious to himself,
 Inflicted endless darkness on his eyes ;
 Our brothers,
 Pierced by each other's lance, have left us now
 The sole survivors of our noble house,
 Why then should we thus odiously devote
 Ourselves to death ?
 The weak are foolish who resist the strong.

ANTIGONE.

I seek not to persuade, or urge thee on
 To aid a deed that I will do alone.
 Yes ! *I* will bury him ! and, doing this,
 Will win a glorious death ! to die for him,
 Will make a brother's love for ever mine !
 Live on ; and venerate a tyrant's law
 Above the sacred rites the Gods command.

ISMENE.

Alas, my sister ! for thy life I fear.

ANTIGONE.

I prize it not; be careful of thine own.

ISMENE.

Betray not your intent : I will be secret.

ANTIGONE.

Proclaim it to the world ! Thy secrecy

Will lose thee my esteem.

I am resolved, no fear of danger shall

Restrain me. It will be glorious thus to die !

ISMENE.

Go; do thy purpose : though it be unwise ;

It proves the deep devotion of thy love.

Exit ISMENE to the Palace.

Exit ANTIGONE, R.

Enter CHORUS, singing as they advance.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Orb of Helios, thou whose light

Over Thebes' seven-gated walls

Never shone more intensely bright,

All hail, eye of the golden day,

Hail ! sublimely thou soarest ;

O'er Dirce's current thy beam thou pourest.

Thy power smote his bright silver shields,

Who left Argos in proud array.

Back, with keen urging lash,

Thou didst his war dash,

Defeated,—affrighted,—affrighted !

'Twas he Polynices won to his cause,

Who flew with his Eagles* over the land.

All screaming and eagerly swooping for prey,

They gap'd for our blood ; while with wing-fans aloft,

They shone like the snow, with their mane-crested helms,

Their breast-plates, their bucklers and lances.

ANTISTROPH 1.

He, surrounded with eager spears,

Gasping o'er our seven portals hung.

Ere his gorge with our blood was filled,

He fled,—crest-fallen fled abased.—

* Eagles. Symbolical of the Argives.

From the heights with his chiefs and their powers,
 The craven, dismayed, retreated
 Ere Hephætos* could fire our towers.
 On his rear the tempest of war
 Rushing resistless, drove him afar,
 Scared him, urged by the Dragon! †

For mighty Jove despises the man
 Inflated with pride; the boaster he hates.
 Hosts he saw, shining in gold, rolling along,
 Like the stormy foaming waves of the Deep.
 He strikes!—hits the man with his fire-flashing bolt,
 Who, mounting our walls, triumphantly shouted—
 “We conquer!”

STROPHE 2.

Death-struck, he lies on the earth, in an instant down-dash'd;
 Dark is the torch that he flourished in hostile phrensy.

He rushed, snorting with rage,
 Pressing onward first to engage:

Scaled the wall,
 First to fall.

All, soon or late,
 Bow to their fate.

Over the strife Ares‡ presiding,
 Guided the right wing.

Every gate of the city a leader besieged,
 Man fighting his man, for victory strove;
 Their bright brazen arms were the trophies of Jove.

But the two who enraged
 With each other engaged;—
 From one mother they came,
 Their sire was the same;—
 With their blood-thirsty spears contended.

They thrust, down they fell!
 Thus their death-struggle ended.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Then came the fame-giving Nicé, the Queen of victory,
 Bearing the palm for the car-celebrated Thebæ.

The dread strife now is o'er,
 Discord ceases, war is no more!

* Torches.

† Dragon. Emblem of the Thebans.

‡ Mars.

Let the night-revel ring,
 Music awaking ;
 In the temples dance, and sing
 Praises to Bacchus,
 Thebes all shaking !

But see! the son of Menœceus comes,
 Creon, who sways our regal sceptre,
 Assigned by Olympus and Fate,
 To govern our state.

We now may learn what design in his breast
 Hath moved him to call our Sages united,
 To hear and heed his high behest,
 By herald summons invited.

Enter CREON, regally attended.

Sages of Thebes : since the Gods again
 Have saved the storm-lash'd vessel of our state ;
 By herald-summons I have gathered ye,
 To hear what I decree. Your loyalty
 To Laius, then to Œdipus, I knew ;
 And after him, your duty to his sons,
 Confirmed by deeds. Since they each other slew,
 The Theban sceptre now, by right, pertains
 To me, their near'st of kindred male. Say, who
 Can read the thoughts of man, or, test his heart
 But by his actions? He, who proudly scorns
 The counsels of the wise, is foolish ;—who yields
 To friendship what his country claims,—is weak.
 Hear me, heart-searching Jove ! to thee I swear ;
 Silence shall never seal my lips, when I
 Behold an ill impending o'er my subjects ;
 I have framed an edict,

To honor him who for his country died.
 Eteocles, the son of Œdipus,
 By sacred rites lies hallowed in the tomb.
 The exile,—Polynices, who returned
 Hostile to Thebes and her Gods, to glut
 Himself with blood, and make his kindred, slaves ;
 His carcase shall unburied lie, to gorge
 The birds and beasts of prey. Thus I decree :
 For baseness shall not share the honours due
 To virtue only. He alone, who loves my country,
 In life, or death, can merit my esteem.

*A Sentinel here hastily enters, in great fear, to inform
 CREON that some one has interred the body.*

CREON.

What fears distract thee thus? explain.

SENTINEL.

The fear of danger makes me hesitate.

CREON.

Briefly explain; and hence depart secure.

SENTINEL.

I now will speak. Some rash intruder came,
And laid the corse beneath a mound of earth.

CREON.

Say! who was he that dared to do this deed?

SENTINEL.

I know not. Neither spade nor axe was used:
The ground was undisturbed: no track of wheels,
No print remained to trace the daring doer.

CREON (*to* SENTINEL).

Now, as I honour Jove, by him I swear!
Bring me the miscreant who entombed the corse:—
This thou shalt do; or, failing, thou shalt die!
Alive suspended, thou shalt lingering writhe,
Till thou betray the doer of the offence!
No more of words! Produce the culprit; or
Just punishment shall fall upon thy head!

Exit CREON, *attended.*

SENTINEL.

May he be soon discovered! As for me;
All I can do, is done; and here again,
I never will return: for now, beyond
My sanguine hopes preserved, I bow, and bend
The humble knee of gratitude to heaven!

Exit SENTINEL.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Wonders in nature we see and scan,
But the chief of them all is—man.
O'er the awful abyss of the deep
He fearlessly dares to sweep,
And through its terrible foaming spray,
He shapes his trackless way.

Tellus* conforms to his desires,
 Yields him her treasures abundant,
 And never tires.
 Yoking his plough to the steer,
 He, from year to year,
 Makes the barren soil redundant.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Feather-clad creatures that flutter in space,
 All the wandering woodland race,
 All that glide in the billowy tide,
 He entices, entoids, and snares
 In woven meshes his hand prepares :
 By skill, he works his will.
 O'er hills and wilds he tracks his game,
 Renders the savage creature tame.
 See the steed with the long flowing mane,
 With the curb and the rein
 He rides him !
 See the stubborn bull,—he guides him !

STROPHE 2.

And the word that embodies the thought,
 To the child by the parent is taught.
 The politic laws he endites ;
 He creates in the language he writes ;
 And when Jove darts the storm,
 He is sheltered and warm !
 By the past, he beholds
 What the undrawn veil of Time enfolds !
 Death lays him low ;
 To the grave he must go :
 When Death assails him,
 Pain-healing knowledge fails him.

ANTISTROPHE 2.

He is versed in the arts ;—he designs,
 He skilfully plans and combines :
 He leans now to good, then to evil draws ;
 Loves his country, bows to her laws.
 Who fears the vow sworn to heaven,
 Honour be given !
 Cursed be the man, may he never smile,
 Who dares to protect the vile.

* The Earth.

Never shall my hearth or banquet cheer him,
Never may his country's councils hear him!

Enter ANTIGONE, conducted by SENTINEL and Guards.

CHORUS.

Amazement! Do the powers of Olympus
Deceive my senses? I know,
Yet fain would deny, that I now
Behold Antigone here!
Miserable child of a wretched father,—
Of Œdipus: ah! what means this?
Say,—can it be, thou hast dared to infringe thus,
The monarch's command?
Can it be, that thou art the offender?

SENTINEL.

It is she! 'tis she who hath buried the corse!
Unaided, she entombed it! Where is the king?

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

He comes.

Enter CREON from the Palace, attended.

CREON.

How now;—is the transgressor found?

SENTINEL.

O King! I here return,
In charge of one, whose guilt will prove my innocence.

CREON.

Why is this virgin brought? Where was she found?

SENTINEL.

I saw her earth his corse, whom you debarred
The rites of sepulture. Am I now understood?

CREON.

What she!—detected!—taken in the act?

SENTINEL.

Let me narrate minutely what occurred.
I and my comrades, by your threats alarmed,
Flew to the spot, and disentombed the body:
Its putrid exhalations drove us back;
And to avoid them, far on its windward side,
We sat upon a slope, to watch th' event.
Then came the virgin,
Plaining, as plains the bird that finds her nest

Bereft of all its brood. Beholding thus,
 The corse unheard ; her sorrow, unrestrained,
 Breaks forth in imprecations, which she hurls
 On them who laid it bare. The scattered earth
 She heaps again upon the dead ; and pours
 Libations from a sacred vase, with prayers
 Thrice sanctified. We seize her in the act,—
 Accuse her of the past,—which she denies not.
 Freed from your threat of vengeance, I rejoice ;
 But thus to implicate this honoured maid, I grieve.

CREON. (*To Antigone.*)

Speak thou,—uplift thy bending head ; and say,
 If thou deny, or own, this flagrant charge !

ANTIGONE.

All he asserts, I do confess I did.

CREON. (*To Sentinel.*)

You are acquitted, and are free to go.

Exeunt SENTINEL and GUARDS.

(*To Antigone.*) Speak and brief ; resolve me what I ask !
 Heard'st thou the mandate which forbade this crime ?

ANTIGONE.

That, which was known to all, was known to me.

CREON.

Why hast thou dared then, thus to spurn my law ?

ANTIGONE.

Because thy mandate was opposed to Jove's,
 And all the sacred dictates men revere.
 Thy power is mortal ; and thy stern decrees,—
 The offspring of a fleeting breath of time,—
 Are far too weak to supersede the laws
 Impressed by all the Gods upon our hearts :
 By Nature sealed, immutable they stand.
 Shall man's capricious will be more revered
 Than their commands ? No ! not by me, O King !
 I will not draw their vengeance on my head.
 Thy law may take its course : for being doomed
 By heaven, to die ; it can but expedite
 The period of those woes that weigh me down,
 And render life a burthen to my soul.
 'Tis better far to die, than live afflicted,—
 Laden with self-reproach for having left

A brother's corse unhonoured with a tomb.
 Esteem my actions, follies,—call my words
 Unwise:—you deem them then, as I deem your's.
 In this respect alone, we both agree.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

The spirit of her haughty father speaks :
 His pride, unyielding, still exists in her.

CREON.

Such arrogance but ill becomes a slave ;—
 A culprit, who hath violated law,
 And proudly smiles,—exulting in her crime.
 To pardon such audacity, would be
 To prove I am the woman ; she, the man.
 Although my sister's daughter,—say the tie
 Were close as Hercian Jove can bind ; she should,
 And shall be punished ; and Ismene, too !—
 Who doubtless is a party in the deed.
 Let her be brought before me ! She's within.—

Exeunt Attendants to the Palace.

Her raving words, and her distracted air,
 Betrayed to me the working of that guilt
 Which terminates in madness. (*To Antigone.*) Hateful
 wretch !

How darest thou thus, convicted of a crime,
 Attempt to sanction it by virtue's plea ?

ANTIGONE.

I am your victim. Will not that suffice ?

CREON.

It will ! it shall ! for thou shalt surely die !

ANTIGONE.

Then strike at once ! and end this war of words ;
 More hateful unto me than unto thee.
 A nobler deed I cannot live to do,
 Than I have done in scorning thy decree.
 What you call guilt, all present would approve,
 If they were free to speak. But tyranny
 Here claims the right alone to speak and act.

CREON.

What honest Theban coincides with thee.

ANTIGONE.

These,—one and all : although they fear to say it !

CREON.

Canst thou speak thus without a blush of shame?

ANTIGONE.

Shame! for what?—a sister's duty to a brother?

CREON.

Was not Eteocles thy brother also?

ANTIGONE.

He was.

CREON.

He, for his country nobly died:
Yet thou hast honoured him who was her foe.

ANTIGONE.

Death-rites to both were due.

CREON.

What! honour guilt
And virtue equally? 'tis impious!

ANTIGONE.

Pluto may deem it just.

CREON.

Just to the just.
Who lives and dies a foe, a foe remains.

ANTIGONE.

My heart recoils from hate, and turns to love.
I loved them both.

CREON.

To Hades then, and love them!
While I exist, no woman shall control me.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

See, from the gate Ismene comes!
The tears she sheds express a sister's love:
The cloud of sorrow lowers o'er her brow:
How faded is the lustre of her cheek!

Re-enter from the Palace, Attendants with ISMENE.

CREON.

Here comes the other viper I have cherished.
I little dreamt I nourished two such foes,
To sap my power, and undermine my throne.
What canst thou say? dost thou partake her guilt?
Admit it, or deny it on thy oath! (*To Ismene.*)

ISMENE.

With her consorting, half her guilt is mine.

ANTIGONE.

Not so! not so! The will to do the deed,
Was only mine; by me alone 'twas done.

ISMENE.

My sister! all thy sufferings I share :
What shame pertains to thee, pertains to me.

ANTIGONE.

Infernal Deities! Ye shades of Death!
Attest the noble deed was all my own!
(*To Ismene*) Love but implied by words, awakes my scorn!

ISMENE.

Despise me not, Antigone! I'll die!
And with thee prove that I revere the dead!

ANTIGONE.

Live on. The merit of the deed is mine;
And mine the privilege to die alone.

ISMENE.

Without thee, O my sister! what is life?

ANTIGONE.

Creon, thy friend there, will reply to that.

ISMENE.

I merit not reproach. O comfort me!

ANTIGONE.

No more of this; but live. My life I pledged,
To pay the honours due to death.

CREON.

What, both
Insane! but one I ever deemed was so.

ISMENE.

O King! the mind misfortune goads, too oft
Forgets her self-control.

CREON.

Wast thou distract,
When thou didst vow to suffer death with her?

ISMENE.

Bereft of her, my life is nothing worth.

CREON.

Think not of her; she's nothing worth to thee.

ISMENE.

And wilt thou slay thy son's affianced bride?

CREON.

Her place shall be supplied by one more worthy.

ISMENE.

He may not deem her so.

CREON.

He shall not wed

With one so base !

ANTIGONE.

Beloved,—dearest Hæmon !

Disgracing me ; thy father wrecks thy peace !

CREON.

Allied to thee ; with thee he'd share my hate.

ISMENE.

Wilt thou, destroying her, destroy his hopes ?

CREON.

By death, her nuptials shall be consummated !

ISMENE.

So, she must die !

CREON.

She must : and you,—and I.

Remove them, guards, without delay ;

And keep them close confined :

For even the boldest will essay,

Escape from death to find.

Exeunt ANTIGONE and ISMENE, conducted by Guards.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

How happy they who, blest by Fate, ne'er tasted evil !

He, whose house our Gods shake, is tottering ;

Curses hang impending,—

Wrath divine on his line descending.

As when the Thracian tempest urges

The ocean-swelling surges ;

Boiling up from the depths of the deep,

The black sands leap,

And onward with the foaming billows sweep ;

They dash and lash the passive shore,

That trembling shudders at their horrid roar !

ANTISTROPHE 1

I still see o'er Labdacus' house, heaven's curse impending ;

Ill on ill behold on his race fast descending.

With the life each father imparts to his son,

The curse first entailed, descends on all for one.

See the last faint ray that was glimmering on us,
 In her of the house of Œdipus ;—
 Behold life's mower standing o'er her !
 See him waiting, scythe in hand !
 Her phrensied pride will soon provoke the Fate's command.

STROPHE 2.

Who can brave, or assail thee, Jove ?
 Who dare spurn at thy power-almighty ?
 Thine eye never closed, nor for a moment slumbered,
 Moons never yet thine ages numbered,
 Thy day rolls onward, never wasting,
 In Olympian light thou dwellest for everlasting ;
 Never ending ages blending,
 The past and the future thou canst see !
 Thy dread will hath ordained this decree,
 " Joy shall be blent with sorrow,"

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Deem not, Hope, when she waves her wings,
 Sheddeth blessings on all who trust her.
 She dazzles the foolish with illusive lustre,
 Shows them the good she never brings ;
 And they slumber till disappointment wakes them.
 Ancient sages wisely said,—
 " Fools misconstrue evil."
 Thus the Gods, by Hope's illusion,
 Beguile, but to lead the vile
 Onward to dire confusion.
 They prosper awhile,
 Then ruin overtakes them.
 See, Hæmon appears !
 The last verdant shoot
 That sprang from thy root :
 Shedding bitter tears,
 He laments his betrothed Antigone.
 Ah ! is she fated by destiny
 Ne'er to crown his affection ?

CREON.

Ye soon will know it better than the Seers themselves.

Enter HÆMON.

Aware of our decree, which dooms thy bride ;
 Com'st thou, my son, in anger to thy sire ;
 Or with obedience and love unchanged ?

HÆMON.

My father ; I am thine, to do thy will ;
 To honour and obey thy just commands,
 And sacrifice my heart's desires to thine.

CREON.

Obedience is the debt a parent claims :
 And this, a grateful son will freely pay.
 Obedient children glorify their sires ;
 We cherish them to comfort us in age,
 To make our friends, their friends ; our foes, their foes.
 And now, my son, let reason be thy shield,
 To guard thee from the artful wiles of love.
 Reject this virgin, who hath proved herself
 My foe and thine. Of all my subjects, she
 Alone stands forth, a rebel to my mandate.
 For which, by faith and honour I have sworn
 That she shall surely die. The laws I frame,
 I deem expedient ; and they all shall be
 Implicitly obeyed. Where Anarchy
 Hath licence, wild confusion reigns ;
 The arts are blighted, cities are despoiled,
 Trade shrinks with horror from the clashing spear,
 And Ruin stalks abroad. Where Order sways ;
 Obedience, hand in hand with smiling Peace,
 Moves dancing through the realm. This, to preserve,
 Should be a king's—shall be my chieftest care.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

If age have shrewed perception, we may see
 Our monarch's words are based on wisdom's code.

HÆMON.

Wisdom, my father, is the richest boon
 The Gods can give, or mortals can receive :
 To question your's, would ill become your son.
 Yet, duty and your interest prompt me oft
 To note the praise or censure you inspire ;
 And tell you, with sincerity, the truths
 Base flatterers and plebians dare not utter.
 Know then, your subjects call this virgin's doom,
 Unjust in you, unmerited by her.
 Your people say,—'twas noble, not to leave
 A brother's corse to batten wolves : for which,
 Instead of death, she merits honour, and
 The world's applause. Oh ! do not proudly think
 That all are wrong but you,—you only right.

Consider well ;
 Relent, my father ; temper wrath with mercy ;
 And be our chief in wisdom as in sway.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

If he, O king, though young, hath counselled rightly,
 And thou should'st heed him, all may yet go well.

CREON.

How ! by a stripling unmatured, shall age
 Be schooled in wisdom ?

HÆMON.

True, I am young :
 The wisdom of the man, is not his age.

CREON,

Should wisdom shield the wretch who spurns the laws ?

HÆMON.

Not if his deeds be evil.

CREON.

And such are her's !
 Am I the subject of the state,—or king ?

HÆMON.

There is no state where one alone commands.

CREON.

The state is mine alone.

HÆMON.

Then reign alone ;
 And wave thy sceptre o'er a barren desert !

CREON.

Wretch ! rebel ! thus to oppose thy father's will !

HÆMON.

It is my father's *error* I oppose.

CREON.

'Twere error not to guard my sovereign rights.
 How can I err by strengthening my power ?

HÆMON.

By framing laws offensive to the Gods,
 You make it weaker.

CREON.

Base,—despicable wretch !
 More vile than she for whom thou strivest thus :

HÆMON.

Tis neither base, nor vile, to strive for virtue.

CREON.

I swear now, by the summit of Olympus,
These taunting insults shall not go unpunished!
Bring forth the culprit!—

Exeunt Guards to the Palace.

She shall perish here;

Yea, in her lover's presence she shall die!

HÆMON.

Mine eyes shall never see a deed so vile:
And thine may never more behold thy son.
Let them who fear, endure thee, and remain.

Exit HÆMON.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Grief so intense, engenders desperation.

CREON.

Let him begone. Not all that he can do,
Shall change their fate, or alter my decree.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Does then our monarch sentence *both* to die?

CREON.

'Tis well remembered. I will spare Ismene:
Antigone shall die!

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

What mode of death?

CREON.

Deep in the cavern of a lonely rock,
Alive, I will ingulph her, with enough
Of food to keep the state from stain polluted:
There, let her pray th' Infernal,—she adores
Above all other powers, for life and freedom.
There,—there, perchance, she may at last perceive,
That pious reverence is bestowed in vain,
Which only honours them who sleep in Hades.

Exeunt CREON, attended.

SEMI-CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

O Eros! all-conquering power;
Inflamer, dread tamer of madness!
At night, the young maiden dreaming,
Sees thee in the vision gleaming.

Thy sway extends over the sea,—
 Over the land,—none are free ;
 The Gods of Olympus bow to thee ;
 Thine eye-piercing dart
 Inflameth the heart
 With desire consuming!

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Allured by thee, swayed by thy might,
 The noblest heart shrinks from its duty ;
 And virtue yieldeth to beauty.
 Friends are parted, and foes united :
 The cherished wish guardedly sealed,
 Sacred desires the lip ne'er revealed ;
 The downcast eye, and the long-drawn sigh,
 The deep-blushing cheek,—
 Ah ! these all bespeak
 Thee triumphant, Eros !

Enter ANTIGONE, conducted by Guards.

CHORUS,

O, heart-rending sight, what emotions rise !
 My sorrow is greater than words can relate :
 It flows from my bosom in streams to my eyes,
 Thus beholding the fair Antigone's fate,
 Urge her on to the doom of all mortals !

ANTIGONE.

Behold me now, my native citizens,
 Treading the pathway to my father's home :
 My last bright beams of golden Helios
 Will set for ever ! Death leads me on
 To Acheron, whose dismal stream I cross
 To peaceful Hades ; there, I soon shall rest.
 Hymen's hymn never there will sound ;
 There, no bridal chorus ever will greet me ;
 I am betrothed to Acheron !

CHORUS.

But worthy of praise, and with honour arrayed,
 Death carries thee, a blooming bride, to his bed ;
 Unchill'd by disease, unscathed by decay,
 Unsmote by the sword in hostile affray,
 Unfettered by will, thy choice uncontrol'd,
 Thou'rt betrothed to the monarch of Hades.

ANTIGONE.

The daughter of the Phrygian Tantalus
 Died horribly upon the heights of Sipylos.

Like the ivy's winding stem,
The sprouting rock entwines and clasps her.
Restless falls the rain on her brow,

Freezing, it changes to snow.
And, 'tis reported, the griefs of her soul,
From her eye-lids incessantly flow.
Thus Death prepares the bed of peace for me!

CHORUS.

Her sons were Gods, a Goddess was she ;
Our fathers were mortal, mortal are we ;—
Remember, how gloriously great it will be,
To share the fate of Immortals!

ANTIGONE.

Woe! woe! deride me not!—
Gods of my fathers! see,
They insult me while I stand
Upon the verge of death!
City and noble citizens,
In every blessing rich : and thou
Clear Dirce,—ye enchanting meads,
Where she meandering flows
Around the car-famed Thebes ;—
I call ye all to witness how,
Unmourned,—unwept by friends,
And by what laws condemned, I go
To linger in the hollow rock
Where I must die! Unhappy me!
Not with the living, nor among the dead
Incarcerated, life to me is death!

CHORUS.

Urged to thy fate by thy will alone,
Thou hast scorn'd the law of Thebes' throne.
In this we see the doom, unhappy one,
Pronounced against thy father.

ANTIGONE.

Ah! ye recall the griefs that rack my heart :—
My father's soul-appalling fate, exposed
To all the world ; and what that fate entailed
On me,—on all the line of Labdacus.
O Fate! the curse that fell on the maternal bed
That gave my father's mother's children birth ;
Was their's, is mine ; they paid, and now I pay
Its penalty : unmarried, I descend to them.
Alas! thy marriage tie, my brother, was a curse to me ;
Thy death now draws thy sister down to thee!

CHORUS.

Honour the dead : 'tis good and wise.
 Honour the law : who dares despise
 Its decrees, when fatal, justly dies.
 Thine own proud will this doom hath chosen.

ANTIGONE.

Not a tear, not a friend !
 All alone I must go
 To the gloomy shades below.
 Thou bright beam of day,
 Ever glorious ray,
 I never shall see thee again.
 Alas ! I look for pity, but in vain !

Enter CREON, from the Palace, attended.

CREON.

If mournful cries availed the death-doom'd wretch,
 Wailing would never cease. Go, lead her hence !
 Immure her instantly within the cavern !
 Alone there, let her linger life away,
 And hold communion with the dead she loves.
 The deed is on her head ; our state is clear.

ANTIGONE.

Oh, dreadful tomb ! Oh, dreary bridal bed !
 Dungeon of death !—thou everlasting home,
 Where I must sojourn with my kindred friends
 Who swell the gloomy train of Proserpine ;
 To whom I go, the last,—the most unhappy ;—
 Cut off ere nature's period !—Yet still,
 Hope whispers me, I shall be dear to thee,
 My father,—thee, my mother,—most of all,—
 To ye, my brothers ; whose pale corsers, I
 With sacred rites and cleansing lavers bathed ;
 Pouring libations duly on thy tomb,
 Eteocles ; and on thy earthy mound,
 Beloved Polynices. And for this,—
 This holy deed, I am to die ! lauded,—
 Lamented only by the wise and just !
 For this,—am I forsaken by my friends,
 And doomed in life to linger with the dead !
 If this be justice, Heaven,—then I have erred :
 And erring, let me die for those offended !
 If they are guilty, may they never share
 The doom of guilt I guiltlessly must bear !

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

The passion-storm, still unallayed,
In all its power excites the maid.

CREON.

For that, her followers shall pay
Tear-drops for her, and their delay.

ANTIGONE.

That menace tells me, Death is near!

CREON.

Lean not on Hope; what I have will'd,
Is fixed; and now shall be fulfill'd.

ANTIGONE.

O, my country!—Thebes!—Home!
And ye who from her bosom come;
Behold my forced,—my dreadful doom!
Ye Theban rulers, see in mine,
The last blood of your regal line!
Behold the dire,—unjust decree,
For what was good and just in me!

ANTIGONE is led off by Guards during the following

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

Royal Danæ long lived in a tower,
Day's bright ray never darted
Through its brass-girted walls;
'Twas to her a cell of death,
Thus from *mankind* was she parted!
Yet, what Destiny will'd, soon was accomplished by Love;
When he of Olympus, mighty Jove, came from above,
Descended on the tower,
In a golden shower.
What can oppose thy power, O Fate?
Can gold? the shield? the ship? the gate?
Ah, no! o'er all thou art triumphant!

ANTISTROPHE 1.

Dryas' impious son, lord of Edonus,
Tore the wine-giving Thyrsus,
And its orgies denied.
Dionysos*, defied,
Fettered him fast in a mountain.

* Bacchus.

He, whose impious proud soul desecrated the rod
 Which charmeth existence ; by the vengeance of its God
 Atoned thus for presuming to defy his power.
 Awed by this wretch, the mystic throng
 Forbore the dance, refrained the song,
 The pipe was mute, the torch was extinguished.

STROPHE 2.

Know ye the rocks of the deep,
 Where Cyanæs' billows sweep ;—
 Where the confluent Bosphorus roars
 On the rugged Thracian shores ;—
 Where Ares, adored,
 Sways o'er each horde ?—
 There, Phineas' two sons—their step-mother, jealous-minded,
 Unjustly charged with crime, condemned and blinded.
 Their lucid orbs no noble weapon extinguished ;
 No ! the deed was done
 By her alone ;
 With her web-entwining shuttle's point, she pierced them !

ANTISTROPHE 2.

Plunged in affliction, the wretched sons
 Bewailed their fate :
 Objects of pity, and ruthless hate,
 They sprang from a mother's hapless union ;
 Whose blood, free from stain,
 First flowed in each vein
 Of the ancient Erechthidæ.
 In distant cells, her parents' winds recked and taught her.

To bound along with their steed-excelling speed :
 (God-like Boreas begat this daughter :)
 Yet the doom which Fate had decreed,
 She could not escape :—it caught her.

Enter TIRESIAS, conducted by a Boy.

TIRESIAS.

Nobles and Thebes, here behold me led
 By him who sees for blind Tiresias.

CREON.

Yet say, dark Seer, what now impels thee hither ?

TIRESIAS.

It is for me to speak, and thee to do.
 Upon my ancient throne of augury
 I sat, divining shadows of the future.—
 Trembling, I turn'd toward the sacred altar ;

From which, instead of flame, streams thick dun smoke :
 The victim smouldering on the ashes lies,
 And rests among the embers unconsumed.
 The Boy beholds these omens with his eyes ;
 The Seer beholds their import in his words :
 And mentally perceives a fatal gloom
 Impending o'er the State ; o'er thee and thine.
 Thus, what he sees for me, I see for thee ;
 And tell thee, King,—the source of all these woes,
 Is thy unjust decree.

The offended Gods

Reject the sacrifice of victims gorged
 With human blood. Consider this, my son ;—
 All men are prone to err : the wise, are they
 Who scan their errors, and amend their faults :
 For perseverance in an evil wrought,
 Is but the climax of the wrong. To wound
 A corse, is folly ; for it is to slay the slain.
 Foes dead, are foes no more : Death cancels strife.
 Believe, your welfare prompts me thus to speak ;
 Prove you esteem my counsel, and be wise.

CREON.

I am the mark, old man ; your prophecies,
 The pointed shafts to which I am obnoxious.
 And thus it is, you gain your Sardinian gems,
 And Indian gold. But not all India's wealth
 Shall purchase sepulture for Polynices.
 No ! should the eagles of the Thunderer
 Soar with the carcase to their master's throne,
 No fear of such pollution should induce me
 To give the wretch a tomb. For who knows not,
 Mortals can never soil th' immortal Gods ?
 Gold, sordid gold, corrupts the best of men ;
 And this induces thee to counsel thus.

TIRESIAS.

I seek no gain from thee.

CREON.

'Tis well : say on.

TIRESIAS.

Ere many days be meted by yon orb,
 One, born of thee, shall pay the dead, a debt
 Of deathly recompense,—yea, even for him
 Whose corse unhallowed lies disgraced by thee ;

And for the victim, guiltless, yet entombed
 Within the hollow of yon fatal rock,
 By thy tyrannic power debarred the rites
 Due to the offended Gods who reign below ;
 Whose sacred claims the Gods on high approve.
 For this,—their awful Furies crouching wait
 In ambush, to requite thee woes for woe.
 Judge now, if gold hath prompted me to speak !
 Yet but a little while, and thou shalt hear
 The shrieks of women and the cries of men,
 Resounding through thy halls in lamentation.
 Thus from my soul, O King, to wrath provoked,
 I hurl my shaft-words piercing through thy heart :
 Nor canst thou, doomed by Fate, avoid their force.
 Lead me away, my boy !—Now let him pour
 The tempest of his rage on younger heads ;
 Or, wisely learn to curb his tongue, and train it
 To utter dictates Virtue may approve.

Exit TIRESIAS, led by the Boy.

GHORUS-SPEAKER.

He's gone, O King ; how dreadful were his words !
 From youth to this gray period of my age,
 I never knew his predications fail.

CREON.

Nor I : and this it is, distracts me. Yielding,
 My pride is wounded ;—yet, if I resist,
 My soul is overwhelmed.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Son of Menœceus,
 Let prudence be thy guide.

CREON.

What shall I do ?
 Say ;—what is your advice ?

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Inter the dead :
 And disinter the living.

CREON.

Must I then yield ?

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Without delay, O King ! the Gods, when wrath,
 Are never tardy to avenge.

CREON.

Yet no.—
 Ah, yes,—I must !—necessity prevails !

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Trust not to others ; grace the act thyself.

CREON.

I will. (*To Attendants.*) Speed with your axes to the place :
 And I, rescinding the decree, will give
 The living freedom, and entomb the dead.
 I fear, *that* justice which the Gods uphold,
 Should, and must be the highest aim of life.

Exit CREON, attended.

HYMN TO BACCHUS.

STROPHE I.

Fair Semele's high-born son,—
 Thou many-named one,—
 Thou, who callest thy father, — the thunderer Jove :
 Object of beautiful Italia's love ;
 Thou, who crownest what Ceres bestoweth on all,
 To thee now we call ;—
 Hear us, Bacchus ! in Thebé, thy Bacchante's home,
 Where the bright Ismenus rolling his waters,
 Unites the Dragon's sons and daughters !

ANTISTROPHE I.

On thy mount's* double-crested heights,
 Thy votive flames ascending,
 With Corycian nymphs attending,
 Grace thy mystic rites ;
 While pure Castalia laves the ground,
 Thy lofty Nysian summit sings, ivy-crown'd,
 Thy praise !
 Vine and tree, warble to thee !
 Thy votive trains chant thy lays,
 Thy sacred chorus raises,
 And Thebes' fanes resound thy praises ;
 Hear us, Bacchus !

STROPHE II.

Above all the rest,
 Thebes thou hast guarded and blest ;
 She† was its pride,
 Who, clasping the Thunderer, died.
 And now, seeking its lost repose,
 We pray thee to come and heal its woes !
 O, hither wend !
 From thy Parnassean heights descend,
 Or from over Eubœa's billows !

* Parnassus.

† Semele.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Thou, whose power inspires
 All our torch-lit, star-vieing choirs,
 Guide our dance, and lead our song,
 Son of Jove, for ever young!
 Come, with mirth and revelry,
 Bring thy Naxian nymphs with thee ;
 Come, and let them, bounding before us,
 Chime and time the tip-toe chorus,
 To praise thee, adore thee, great Iacchus !
 Hear us, Bacchus !

Enter MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

O, citizens of Thebes,—Sons of Cadmus ;—
 How unassured is man of his estate !
 The best should not be envied, nor the worst,
 Despised : for fickle Fortune at her pleasure,
 Exalts the humble, casts the haughty down,
 And makes our future only vague surmise !
 I envied Creon's power, and thought him happy,
 Honoured with sovereignty, and blest with sons.
 Now,—what is he ? Can man be said to live
 When all his joys are dead ?—he is, at best,
 An animated corse. What are his wealth,
 His dazzling grandeur, and his boundless power,
 When joyless, he enjoys them not ? Alas !
 They are but shadows,—shadows of a dream !

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

What woes have fallen on our royal master ?

MESSENGER.

Death : they are dead. He lives who caused their death !

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Who lives ?—be brief ; and tell us,—who are dead ?

MESSENGER.

Hæmon is dead.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Dead ! Hæmon ! by whose hand ?

His father's, or his own ?

MESSENGER.

His own. Raving

Against his father ; mourning o'er the corse
 Of her he loved, he fell.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

The Seer was too

Prophetic !

MESSENGER.

He was. What now remains to do ?

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

Behold! Eurydice, the hapless wife
Of Creon, hither comes. She may not yet
Have heard the dreadful tidings of her son.

Enter EURYDICE, attended.

EURYDICE.

O, Citizens! while going from my home,
To offer suppliant vows at Pallas' shrine;
Upon the threshold, Rumour breath'd a tale
Of misery, affecting me and mine.
O'erpowered, I fainted in my women's arms.
But tell me all!—however dire the tale,
I cannot be more intimate with woe.

MESSENGER.

Although I might conceal the dreadful truth
By specious falsehood, it would soon be known:
Believe then from my lips, what I beheld.
Creon, thy lord, I followed to the field
Where Polynices' corse lay, torn by dogs.
With earnest vows, imploring Proserpine
And Pluto, to avert their wrath, we reared
A pyre of branches, laved the mangled body,
And strewing it with newly gathered leaves,
Burnt it, and raised a mound of earth above it.
Thence, on we sped towards the virgin's rock.
Approaching it, we heard what seemed the sound
Of distant lamentation. The King exclaimed—
“ Oh! my prophetic fears are realized;—
I know that voice too well,—it is my Hæmon's!”
We looked within, we entered, and beheld
The virgin dead,—self-strangled with her zone.
There was the youth, his arms around her clasped,
Wailing for her, and him who caused her death.
The trembling King, advancing, said,—“ My son,
What purpose brings thee here?—Come forth, I pray thee!”
The youth, with silent indignation, gazed,
Rushed, sword in hand, against the King, who fled.
Thus foiled, your desperate son made his own heart
The weapon's scabbard.—On the maiden's bosom,
He, with his spirit, poured his life-blood forth;
And consummated thus the mystic tie
Of love, on Pluto's dreary bed. Alas!

The melancholy deed should teach us all,
The miseries that rashness draws on man!

Exit EURYDICE, attended.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

What means the Queen? in silence she is gone.

MESSENGER.

I marvel, Yet her well-known prudence may
Have prompted her to vent her grief unseen
By any but her maidens.

CHORUS-SPEAKER.

It may be so;
But grief will vent itself in words or deeds.

MESSENGER.

I'll follow her; for I surmise with ye,
Her silent grief forebodes some dreadful deed.

Exit MESSENGER.

Enter CREON, with Attendants bearing the body of his Son.

CHORUS.

Our monarch appears;
See the burthen he bears!
To his bosom he clasps Death's fatal token,
The corse of his own,
The deed is his own,
If freely the truth may be spoken.

CREON.

Ah me! behold the dire result of rigour;
Which thus hath caused the death of life I gave!
My errors are my curse! My son! my son!
Doomed to untimely death! O, deep, deep woe!
This is the fruit of my presumption, not thy fault!

CHORUS.

Alas! thou seest too late,
That Justice guideth Fate!

CREON.

I do,—and to my sorrow! On my head
Hath fallen the dreadful anger of the Gods,
And I am stricken down to deep despair!
Alas! thus all my joy is turned to grief!
Ah! vain, vain, vain are all the hopes of man!

Enter MESSENGER from the Palace.

MESSENGER.

O king! the burthen of misfortune borne
 Within thy arms, is but a part of woes
 Which thou must bear. Thy regal home
 Contains yet more!

CREON.

Can there be worse than that I deem the worst!

MESSENGER.

Your Queen, afflicted for her much loved son,
 Hath gone to join him weltering in her blood.

CREON.

O death! Insatiate maw of Hades, why,
 O why dost thou thus swallow me in mine?
 What more of woe, thou messenger of ill?
 Thy words have barbed the death-dart rankling *here!*
 What wouldst thou? Speak! what worse canst thou narrate?
 Tell me, hath she, by self-inflicted death,
 Filled full the measure of my grief?

CHORUS.

Thine eyes will tell thee!—Yonder, see the lifeless corse.

The Scene opens and discovers the corse of the Queen, her attendants weeping around it.

CREON.

Alas! O new calamity! What more
 Of ill hath Fate in store for me? Here, here,—
 Within these arms I clasp my liveless son:
 And yonder see my wife a bleeding corse!
 Ah, wretched mother! hapless child!

MESSENGER.

Enraged, she stood by your domestic altar:
 Ere night fell on her eyes, she wept aloud
 For Megareus' glorious fate: and then
 For Hæmon wailing, on his murderer's head
 She hurled her curse.

CREON.

Her curse! her curse! I shudder at the thought!
 Will no one pierce me with a two-edged sword?
 Surrounded by inextricable woes,
 Plunged deep in sorrow, ye behold me now.

MESSENGER.

Dying, she charged thee with her children's death.

CREON.

Say, in what manner did she cease to live?

MESSENGER.

Her own hand struck the weapon to her heart,
When she received the news of Hæmon's death.

CREON.

O woe to me! on me alone the weight
Of these disasters falls! the crime is mine,
For I alone it was who caused their death,—
I murdered them!—I, only I! Come hither, come;
And quickly bear me hence; for I am—nothing!

CHORUS.

Thou hast succeeded, if thine aim was sorrow's gain:
But wisely 'tis ordained that time soothes mental pain.

CREON.

O come, O come,—my final day, appear!
And lead me to the end that I desire,—
The last and best of my unhappy life;—
Let me not live to see another dawn!

CHORUS.

The future for the future: what the present needs,
Must be provided for, and met by present deeds.

CREON.

What I desire, I made my earnest prayer!

CHORUS.

Desire avails not; what the Fates ordain, will be:
Prayer nor advances, nor retards their stern decree.

CREON.

Bear hence a man the shadow of himself!
My son! I caused, but did not will thy death,—
Nor thine, my wife! O wretched, hapless me!
Ah, whither shall I turn,—on whom repose?
Calamity hath fallen on my head,
And all my hopes are shattered by the blow!

Exit CREON, attended.

CHORUS.

'Tis wisdom that sees
The way to the blest;
To revere the decrees
Ordnained by the Deities,
Ever is best.
All the strokes of injustice
Most justly rebound;
Recoiling, they wound.

When erring men, corrected, grow sage;
Their wisdom crowns their age.

THE END.

